

So, my fellow Americans and my fellow citizens of the world, let us leave this place renewed, in a spirit of civility and humility, and a determination not to use the power of our words to tear down.

I was honored to say in the State of the Union last week that none of us can change our yesterdays, but all of us can change our tomorrows. That, surely, is the wisdom of the message we have heard on this day.

Lastly, let me ask you to pray for the President that he will have the wisdom to change when he is wrong, the courage to stay the course when he is right, and somehow, some-

how, the grace of God not to use the power of words at a time in human history when words are more omnipresent and more powerful than ever before to divide and to destroy but instead to pierce to the truth, to the heart, to the best that is in us all.

Thank you all, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel and Towers. In his remarks, he referred to Martin Lancaster, chair, National Prayer Breakfast; evangelist Billy Graham; former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young; and singer Janice Sjostrand.

Interview With Religious Affairs Journalists February 2, 1995

The President. Well, I'm glad to see you all and welcome you here, for many of you, for the first time. As you know, in the State of the Union Address I issued a challenge, and as part of my explanation of the New Covenant in challenging citizens to be more responsible, to people of faith and to religious leaders specifically to help us to deal with those problems that we have to deal with person by person and from the inside out, to help us to deal with the problems of teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock birth, to help us to deal with the challenges of excessive violence, to help us to deal with the things that have to be organized and dealt with literally one by one at the grass-roots level. And while I think we have to be more tolerant of all people, no matter what their differences are, we need to be less tolerant of conditions that are within our power to change.

And as you know now, for 2 years, ever since I took this job, I've been trying to find ways to galvanize the energies of people of faith to work together on a common agenda that nearly all Americans would agree on and, at the same time, to try to respect the differences of opinion and views. Our administration strongly supported the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and we've worked very hard to implement it in a good faith way. And I think an awful lot of people from right across the spectrum of religious affiliations in our country would agree that we have done that.

Anyway, if you have any questions, I'd be glad to answer. But the other thing I was going to say today—what I said today was that the problems our country faces today are quite profound, you know, the fact that a rising tide is not lifting all boats; that a lot of people, in spite of this remarkable recovery, have not gotten a raise and they're more vulnerable with their health care, their pensions; and the fact that a lot of people find their values violated and their security violated by crime and violence and the breakdown of the social order. It would be very hard to assert that there are more profound difficulties than the problems of previous days, than the problems that George Washington or Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt confronted.

The difference is that in the information age, which gives us these vast new opportunities because the creation of wealth is based on knowledge and that these people have access to more knowledge than ever before, it's also a great burden because words have greater power today than ever before, not only to build up but also to tear down, to divide, to destroy, to distract. And therefore, in a very profound sense in the modern world, it is more important that people be striving for the kind of spiritual presence of mind and peace of mind that will lead you to use words to build up and to unify, instead of to divide and tear down. And I really do believe that. I think that it's clearly different

from any previous time. Words have always been able to wound in letters or speeches or whatever. But the omnipresence of information today and the fact that we're buried in it, it seems to me, imposes an even greater responsibility on people in positions of respect and trust and power to use those words more carefully.

Personal Morality

Q. An awkward question, sir. The moral crusade elements of the State of the Union Address, teenage pregnancy, as an example, sits well, except that there are investigations into your own conduct which some people say leaves an impression. Is this interfering with your ability to lead that type of crusade?

The President. Not in my own mind. That's up for other people to determine. But the one thing that I would say today—we live in an age where anybody can say anything and, unlike in previous times, it gets into print. And even if they admit they took money to say it—which is what happened in my case a couple of times—it still gets wide currency. So there's not much I can do about that.

I can tell you this: The work I've tried to do to reduce teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births generally is something I've been involved in for many years. And I think it's a very serious matter. The life of these young people was very, very different than my life was when I was their age. Their temptations, their travails, it's very, very different and much more difficult for them. And I think we've got to try to find a way to help them walk back from what is now happening.

Interestingly enough—this is a statistical comment I'm making now—there is some evidence that the efforts may be beginning to have some impact. The actual numbers of out-of-wedlock births have stabilized in the last 2 or 3 years. The rate of illegitimacy is going up because the rate of childbearing by couples who are young and successful is going down, which is another problem for another discussion. But anyway, I don't see that we have any choice as a people to deal with it, and it's—and you know, if folks want to use that as another excuse to attack me, that's their problem, not mine.

Welfare Reform and Abortion

Q. Related to that, some people suggest that both your welfare reform proposals and the Contract With America's welfare reform pro-

posal takes such Draconian measures against these unwed teen mothers in terms of limits that what it's likely to do is to drive up the abortion rate, not stop the unwanted pregnancy rate but drive up the abortion rate. Do you see that happening?

The President. Well, I don't agree with that in my proposal, and obviously I don't know what would happen in the others, but let's look at that.

The abortion rate has been going down in America. And I think it's been going down for—maybe because of all the protest against abortion. But I also think that most Americans have deeply ambivalent feelings. That is, I believe that a majority of Americans are pro-choice and anti-abortion. That is, they don't believe that the decision should be criminalized because there are too many different circumstances where most of us feel that decisions should be left to the people who are involved rather than having a totally legal prohibition. On the other hand, most people think in most circumstances that abortion is wrong and that it shouldn't be done.

So the abortion rate is going down in America. It's still very much too high, and we've tried to do some things to make adoption more attractive. And there was a law signed last year, that's gotten almost no notice because it was part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to try to remove the prohibitions or the discriminations in courts across the country in cross-racial adoptions to try to do whatever we could to just encourage more adoptions.

But let me back up to your question and to explain, if I might, why I don't agree that our position would cause more abortions. There are basically three different approaches, with a zillion different limitations, but three different approaches in this welfare debate. There is the Contract approach which is deny benefits to the second welfare child born out of wedlock. And then this extreme version is deny benefits to any teenager who has a child out of wedlock and to that child for up to 18 years. That's what—then there's the people who say, turn it over to the States and let them do whatever they want, which could include that.

Our position is give the States a lot more flexibility, but don't punish the children; take care of their basic needs. And we say don't cut the parents off of public assistance unless, number one, they're bad parents or, number

two, they do things which will undermine their ability to either be successful workers or successful parents.

So for example, the way our plan works is if you're a teenager and you have a baby, in order to draw the public assistance in a normal way you'd have to stay in school, you'd have to live at home with your parents, and if you lived in a bad home you'd have to live in some other supervised setting. You'd have to cooperate and help identify the father so we could attempt to get the father to pay child support and support the child. If at the end of your education period and training, if 2 years have elapsed and you haven't gone to work, then you would have to go to work if there were a job available. And if you turned down a job, you could lose your benefits. Under their proposal, the second problem is, you'd be cut off after 2 years whether there's a job there or not.

So the two differences are, I say cut people off after a limited amount of time if there's a job there. They say cut them off altogether. I say only take benefits away from people if they misbehave as parents or in their own responsibilities. They say if you have a child out of wedlock and you're a teenager, you should never get benefits and neither should your child.

I'll leave it to you to conclude what impact that might have on the abortion rate; I don't know. But I don't believe ours would. I think ours is responsible. You have to have more requirements on people; you can't just continue to perpetuate the present system. But I don't think you should punish the children or punish people for their past mistakes. You should deal with their present conduct.

Child Health and Welfare

Q. What about the suggestion that, particularly of Speaker Gingrich, that the churches and the charities should be able to take over much of the responsibility, including the financial responsibility that the Government now has for foster children and various other tough social situations? Is that an appropriate way for these problems to be taken care of, for these people to be cared for? And if so, how should the money get there?

The President. Well, I think the churches could well be involved in more activities. For example, I think that you might—and one of the things that I want to do is to give more

flexibility in how to implement welfare reform to State and local government. If they want to involve the church, particularly, for example, in developing supervised settings for young girls and their children who can't, and shouldn't, be living in their homes because of the problems in their homes, that's the sort of partnership that I would certainly not oppose.

But I don't think you can say from that that there's no national interest which should command some taxpayer support to make sure that these children have minimal levels of nutrition and medical care and just the basic things that it seems to me we've got an interest in doing, because we don't want to lose any more of these kids than we have to.

The welfare benefits themselves, by the way, are not a problem. The real welfare benefits are about 40 percent lower than they were 20 years ago. So nobody goes on welfare for the check. It's the child care; it's the food stamps; it's the medical care for your children. Therefore, nearly anybody who can will get off and go to work if they can take care of their children and their children won't lose their health care.

But do I think the churches should do more? I do. And one of the things that we want to do is to give more operational control of this program to the States and let them use churches or community organizations or others to do whatever they can to repair the families.

Q. Much of what the churches already do—for instance, Catholic Charities, their money comes from contracts through Federal agencies. In essence, what some of the Republican proposals are asking them to do is to continue doing the sort of work but without those contracts, without the money.

The President. Well, it will just be harder for them, won't it? I mean, I think—I mean, Fred is a good example. The Government does not—we are not a particularly generous country in terms of social welfare. The thing—I don't think the American people object to spending tax money on poor people. I think what they object to is spending tax money on a system that perpetuates destructive conduct and irresponsible conduct. I think that the issue is—for example, I don't think most Americans really think that it would be a great idea to cut out all spending on poor children in order to afford a capital gains tax cut. I don't think that's where they would come down. On the other hand, would they rather have a tax cut or just waste

money on any program, including a program that perpetuated dependency? I think they would—or reduce the deficit or whatever.

So I think the—what my goal is, is to say there's a national interest in the health and welfare of our children. I think it requires some investment of taxpayer money in the areas of particularly basic health care and nutrition and immunization of children against serious diseases. But the systems are dysfunctional. So I think we ought to try to fix them.

Response to Criticism

Q. In a meeting of Baptist leaders back in October you were asked a question about some of your critics who were attacking you with unsubstantiated charges. I'm thinking specifically of Reverend Falwell pushing a video on his TV program. And your response to the question was that you were busy running the country and didn't want to respond to your critics, but you were surprised that the Christian community wasn't taking these men on.

Since that time, I know American Baptist Tony Campollo was asked for equal time on his show to try to defend you. But do you know of any other attempts like that, or anything since that time to try to answer some—

The President. There have been an awful lot of attempts—I think there have been a lot of press stories refuting some of the specific allegations. But I would just say again, in the world we're living in—I'll say what I said at the prayer breakfast today—there is an inordinate premium put on the use of words to destroy or to distract people. And it takes away from my ability to be President, to do the job with a clear head and a clear heart and to focus on the American people, if I have to spend all my time trying to answer charges about what people say that I did years ago. And I just can't do it; I just can't do it.

I do the very best I can. Sometimes you can actually disprove something someone says about you. A lot of times, some people could lie about you in ways that you can't disprove. You can't always disprove every assertion. So insofar as whatever happened, I can't change yesterday, I can only change today and tomorrow. So I've just got to keep going. I think it is—I think I have—if I'd done anything, even though I've tried not to deal with it at all, I think whatever time I've spent kind of trying to absorb those blows since I've been President has been time

and effort and energy, emotional as well as intellectual energy, has taken away from the American people. And I'm not going to cheat them anymore; I'm just not going to do it. I'm tired of letting other people say things that require me to deprive the American people of the best effort I can make. They'll have to make whatever evaluation of this they want to.

There is a difference between reputation and character, and I have increasingly less control over my reputation but still full control over my character. That's between me and God, and I've just got to try to be purified by this.

I also noticed, Winston Churchill said—I ran across this the other day—that just because someone strays from the truth in criticizing you doesn't mean you can't learn something from their criticism. So I've decided that I'll try—need to learn a little something from my critics, even if what they say is not so. None of us are perfect, and I'm certainly not. But I just can't—I really think I made the right decision to try to just tune it out and go forward.

Q. Is there a place in the Scriptures where you find a source for the kind of faith you talked about earlier and stillness in facing these things, a story or a parable or a reading that you've turned to?

The President. Well, it's interesting, I just finished reading the entire Psalms. I also read—this is ironic—Lloyd Ogilvie's book on the Psalms that I didn't—I read it before he was selected to be Chaplain of the Senate. And there are a lot of the Psalms where David is sort of praying for the strength to be sort of purified in the face of adversity and in the face of his own failures.

There are a lot of the Proverbs which talk about the importance of keeping a quiet tongue and at least not getting in your own way, which I've done a lot in my life and which I've tried, even still, to grow out of. And I've spent a lot of time dealing with that over the last 2 years, as you would imagine I would have to.

I think the important thing, and I find this in the Scriptures over and over again, the important thing that I have to keep focusing on is what am I going to do today, what am I going to do tomorrow, how can I be free to call on the power of God to make the most of this job that I have for a little bit of time in the grand sweep of things. And that's just what I keep focusing on every day.

But I think—you'd be amazed how many people write me little fax notes, from friends of mine on a daily basis, saying look at this Scripture, look at that Scripture, look at the other Scripture. During this difficult period, a lot of people were giving me different Psalms to read—it was amazing—and so I did.

Negativism in Politics

Q. Sir, when you talk about destructive language, if you—you refer to personal attacks on yourself. But what about some of the uncivil language which has been so much in the news over the past months that has been in Congress? Are you including that in—

The President. Oh, sure. I said today at the prayer breakfast, I don't think anybody in public life, including me, is blameless. I think it's that there are general—excuse me, genuine differences that people have on issues, and they ought to express them. But our public life needs more of the spirit of reconciliation, it needs more civility, it needs more humility. Sometimes we think we know things we don't.

And I think on debates over public issues, that is true as well. The American people very much want us to—they respond to these negative things, but they don't like it. The reason it keeps happening is because they respond to it. The politicians read polls, you know, and they know very often that the negative campaigns work and elect people. And they know that if you just constantly demean and run down people, like, after a while it sticks. They know that, so they keep on doing it. And the people respond to it, but they hate it. It's almost saying, "I wish you'd lock this liquor store up so I couldn't drink anymore."

And so somehow we have to crawl back off of this wedge because it has, as I said, it's—today people get more information that is sort of argumentative and editorial and often less accurate, and then get in a more negative context than ever before. And it is a function of the information explosion. And so I do believe that I and others have a heavier responsibility even than we might have had in a former time, when in order to just get people's attention, you might take a little license with your language, you know.

Politics and Religion

Q. [Inaudible]—proven through the words and your actions that you are a genuinely reli-

gious person, since you were very young, and your wife as well. And a lot of religious people I talk to don't seem to accept that, who don't seem to feel it's genuine, feel that you're using it in the course of making politics. And I'm wondering why, if you believe that, too, and if you—any analysis as to why that is and what it might say about the role of religion in politics, whether they really ought to be bound together—

The President. Well, I don't think they should be bound together. I mean, I think the First Amendment is a good thing for our country, that we protect the right of everybody to be faithful to whatever they believe by not uniting church and state. But I don't think you can change people or who they are. They have the convictions they have. They have the beliefs they have.

And what I've tried to do is to draw the proper balance by encouraging people of all faiths, including people who disagree with me, to be activist citizens. I think the—the book that Stephen Carter wrote on that, he makes a better statement about that than I can make, in terms of why they don't accept that about me. I think it's hard to make a case that I have tried to use this. I've never tried to say that—for example, I never tried to say that there was a Christian coalition behind anything I did, you know, that God had ordained us to do these following things and I knew it, and anybody that didn't was seized by the Devil. I never said that.

I've said that like every other person, I consider myself a sinner because I believe I consider myself forgiven. I consider—you know, I need the power of God. This is a humble thing for me. But it's an important part of my life and has been for a long time, but especially again in recent years and before I became President. And the same thing is true for Hillary.

I think the truth is that there are people who don't believe it's genuine because they disagree with me politically. They don't believe that you could be a committed Christian and not want to criminalize all abortions. "I just don't believe you can be"—that's what they think. They don't believe that you could be a committed Christian and believe that—take the position that I took on gays in the military. They thought—think the Bible dictated the previous policy on gays in the military, even though we fought two World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam

with a different policy. But they don't believe that. That's their conviction.

So then I think there are people, once they disagree with you so much, who will believe—who will believe in perpetuating anything anybody says about you, and so they think that's evidence of that. But—you know, the Bible is full of refutations of the latter point. All they had to do was read the Scripture to know better than to make that argument. But I can't worry about them; that's their problem. Let them think what they want.

I literally—you know, the one thing I realize is, is I wasted too much time when I got here, and it caused me to be a less effective President, either being hurt by or paying a great deal of attention to what people said about me in the past. And I've just got to try to keep going and fight against it, because the people that wanted to really blow that up either wanted to do it for their own purposes or wanted to do it literally without regard to whether the Government of the United States functions or the public interest is furthered. It's just a crazy way to behave; you can't do it. It never happened before in our history to this extent, and it shouldn't be happening now. And if it is happening, I can't control it. So what I should do is just do my job and shut it out; that's what I have to do.

Q. Sir, do you think that religious groups such as the Christian Coalition risk their credibility by wholesale endorsement of the Contract With America?

The President. Well, I think that's for others to judge, I think, but I would say this: You know, I think that they will come to be seen more and more like a political party with an agenda, rather than people who are driven into politics based on one or two issues that they believe the Bible dictates a position different from the present policy of the United States.

And there are a lot of European political parties with the name "Christian" in them, the Christian Democratic Party in Germany, Helmut Kohl's party. Nobody considers him to be, how should I say, sacrilegious because he's part of a party called the Christian Democratic Party that has religious roots, but no one anymore seriously believes that every position they take is rooted in their reading of the Scripture. And

I think that the Christian Coalition is long since at that point.

Now, the thing I do think they have to be careful about with their credibility is the very, very hard hits they put on office holders who don't do as they believe. I remember one of the Members of Congress who lost in the last election told me of an encounter with a Christian Coalition minister who said to this Member, "Well, you want to see what we're going to put out in our churches on Sunday, tomorrow?" And she said, "Yes, I'd like to see it." And she went to these ten items; she said, "But these two things aren't true." He said, "So, it's generally true. So what?"

So I think that that could hurt their credibility more than anything else, the idea that they're using the emotions of people of faith who are deeply disturbed for good reasons with what's going on in our country today and channeling those emotions into convictions about people in public life that aren't true. Now, that could hurt their credibility.

But I think just taking positions on these other things, I think everybody knows that they basically are an arm of the Republican Party and that they're going to take all these positions. I don't see that there's anything wrong with them doing it. And I agree with some of them, too. You know, I don't disagree with everything in that Contract; I agree with some of it.

Did everybody get a question? I'm glad to see you.

Q. It's good to see you.

The President. Thanks. Do you ever wish you were back in Conway?

Q. Almost every day when I'm driving out to Fairfax County for that hour and a half. [Laughter]

The President. It's pretty out there. I had a woman today from Lonoke come sing at the prayer breakfast. It made me so homesick I could hardly stand it.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:46 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Henry W. Foster, Jr., To Be Surgeon General and an Exchange With Reporters February 2, 1995

The President. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary, and let me say it's a pleasure to have Mrs. Foster and Senator Frist, Congressman Clement here.

The Surgeon General of the United States has enormous responsibilities. As the public face of our Public Health Service, he or she really is the people's doctor, the person responsible for promoting good health practices and alerting the Nation when health threats exist. To fill this post, I wanted someone who is both a top-flight medical professional and a strong leader and effective communicator. Dr. Henry Foster is such a person. And I am pleased today to announce my intention to nominate him as the Surgeon General of the United States.

He is widely respected in the world of medicine and science. After serving his country for 2 years as an Air Force medical officer, he became chief of obstetrics and gynecology at Andrew Memorial Hospital at Tuskegee University.

For the past 21 years, he has worked at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. As the dean of the school of medicine and its acting president, he helped Meharry to lead the way to meeting the health needs of the poor and the underserved. At the moment, he is a visiting senior scholar at the Association of Academic Health Centers here in Washington.

In the communities he's served, Dr. Foster has won hearts and minds for his innovation and his dedication to saving the lives of young people and vulnerable people. He's received numerous honors for his work in obstetrics and dealing with sickle cell anemia and, very notably, in the prevention of teen pregnancy.

He has shown us how one person can make a difference. Eight years ago he developed and directed the "I Have A Future" program at Meharry to help stop teen pregnancy. It has been an unqualified success. Working with young people that others might think beyond help, he built up their self-esteem. He taught them job skills. He encouraged them to stay in school. Most important, he told them to be responsible for themselves. Thanks to Dr. Fos-

ter, these young people have a chance to live a good, full life.

I want Dr. Foster to use what he's learned to help America attack the epidemic of teen pregnancies and unmarried pregnancies. We know Government can only do so much. So large a part of Dr. Foster's job obviously will be to use his enormous skills of persuasion to reach out to people in the private sector, in the religious, education, entertainment, sports, and other communities in this country. As I said in the State of the Union, when I challenged all sectors of our society to help us deal with these problems that must be dealt with one by one, we have to have help everywhere. I am convinced Dr. Foster is the person to galvanize this help and lead this charge. We want everyone to do their part to find the solution to this problem.

I want Dr. Foster now to say a few words, but as I introduce him, I want to thank him for taking on a task in public service at a time when public service sometimes has prices that are clearer than rewards. I thank him for his willingness to serve, to try to make a difference in the health care of the people of this country and especially to try to make a difference in the future of the people of this country.

I thank his friends and colleagues for supporting him, the marvelous letter we received from Donna Shalala's predecessor, Dr. Lou Sullivan, the letter we received from the head of the American Medical Association, and of course, the support you have from your Congressman, Bob Clement, and from Senator Frist, who just told me that he's the first doctor elected to the United States Senate since before the Depression.

So I would say it is time. Now, I'm going to try to keep from feeling so poorly I need his help in any way other than a legislative sense.

Dr. Foster, the podium is yours.

[At this point, Dr. Foster thanked the President and made brief remarks.]